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LORD BYRON'S GONDOLIER.

VENETIAN gondoliers have reflected reputations, like those of painters' and sculptors' models, for having been employed by some celebrity. We had not been in Venice a day before Whistler's gondolier was pointed out to us, or a week before we learned that Ruskin had pensioned off the old boy who used to paddle him around when he was studying the stones of Venice. Later we were told that Lord Byron's gondolier was still living somewhere on the other side of the canal.

The artist who informed me of the old gondolier, promised to take me to see him sometime, but postponed the appointment again and again—so often that I almost despaired of ever seeing the man unless I searched him out myself.

I went to Beppo, our gondolier, and asked him about "Byron's gondolier," but Beppo had never heard of Byron, apparently, and looked troubled and anxious that I should want to know the address of another gondolier. Then, as usual, I went to an old person familiarly known as "the Ancient Venetian"—fuller of information than any guide-book—and asked him concerning the personage of my search.

"Did you ever see Lord Byron's gondolier?" I asked him, at the café one evening.

"No, but I have heard that he still lives."

"Could you find out for me where?—it would be a great favor."

"Certainly; it is not late, let us go now."

I suggested that some other time would do, but with his customary wish to render service, the old Venetian left his coffee unfinished and hurried me along the narrow *callas*, for he was anxious to arrive at his destination before the firing of the nine o'clock cannon. I suggested a gondola, but he said we could reach our destination sooner on foot and by the ferry.

Near the Academy of Fine Arts, there is a tavern, the rendezvous of the ferrymen, and here my friend entered, publicly announcing our errand.

There was silence for a moment, and then some one suggested that we might be looking for Guiseppe Broccoz, in which suggestion everyone acquiesced and volunteered us escort to his lodgings near by. We declined to form a procession, but were obliged to accept the assistance of one of the men, and in a few turns found ourselves in a narrow, obscure *càlla*. Before one of the doorways, our guide stopped and pulled a bell; a window opened and a head appeared.

"What is wanted?"

"Guiseppe Broccoz."

In went the head and another took its place,—these heads, seen against the sky, looking like the portraits in fashion in our grandfathers' time,—cut out of black paper and stuck on light backgrounds.

"Comando?" from the second silhouette.

"Come down; these illustrious strangers wish to speak with you."

"No!" I quickly put in, "we will go up;"—for I was

anxious to see the interior also. And up we went, lighted by a grandson of the gondolier, a handsome fellow, well known to our countrymen, as he is one of the English-speaking gondoliers.

The lower room of the house was filled with lumber boards, old sails and lanterns, and had the general appearance of a boat loft. We climbed up the step-ladder which served for stairs, and came to a landing where a small lamp before a shrine threw its soft light on a bunch of fresh lilies hanging before it with their stems in a bottle. The old gondolier came out holding a candle above his head, and as its light fell upon his features he looked much more like an old Englishman than an Italian, and to my delight addressed us in very good French.

There was some one already in bed in the room we entered, and having succeeded in finding the old gondolier I was satisfied to make an engagement with him to pose for his portrait next day. We then tried to slip out again, which was not easy, as the old man insisted upon showing his photographs and those of his children and grandchildren; and the English-speaking grandson wanted to know if I were acquainted with Mr. this and Madam that, who, he said, were my compatriots, by whom he had been employed. As he knew I belonged to our Beppo, he did not ask for our patronage, but was exceedingly anxious I should "remember him" if I had friends who wished for a gondolier, and he gave me his card with the good wishes for the new year printed on the back of it.

The next morning my sister Lelie and I settled ourselves amongst the cushions of our gondola.

"Comando?" questioned Beppo as he took his place on the stern and arranged the peacock's feather in his hat, for Beppo is much more careful of his appearance when he has *la signora* aboard.

I had persuaded my sister to go with me, hoping she would be able to keep the old man awake while I sketched him,—knowing by experience that the people who pass a laborious life in the open air are drowsy the moment they are obliged to sit quietly in an apartment;—besides, she was very willing to go, as I had boasted loudly the night before, when the old Venetian and I had returned to the "*Quadri*," and she was curious to see our discovery.

When we arrived at our destination, old Broccoz was evidently on the lookout for us. He came down the steps and saluted us in French. Beppo cast a sad look at me, as if he thought we were unfaithful to him; he quickly stepped before Broccoz, who was about to present his arm in the usual balustrade manner to the *signora*, and looked sadly after us as we disappeared in the *càlla* escorted by the old man.

We found the principal chamber prepared for a studio, and the model talkative. He was soon repeating poetry to my sister;—Byron's "Venice, Pride of the Sea."

"That must be a translation," she said, but the old man insisted that it was not, and declared that Byron originally wrote in Italian. We tried to encourage him to tell us some stories about Byron, asking him many questions, not caring if he should exaggerate a little if we could only

obtain a story we had never heard before ; but he would not take advantage of the opportunity, and at last we discovered,—not that he was an imposter, but only a “second oar.” His father had been Byron’s favorite gondolier, and he, at that time a young man in his teens, often pulled a second oar, and on rare occasions had paddled the poet alone. He knew where Byron had lived, knew of his life at the Armenian Convent, and fairly worshipped his memory. Byron was, without doubt, enshrined amongst the saints in his private calendar. He had never been interviewed or sketched before, to keep his memory awake ; if he had, he naturally would have added to his remembrances, and have been able to give us, late-comers, a glowing account of his exploits ; but as it was, he either lacked imagination or was too honest to take advantage of the points we suggested.

“What shall I ask him next?” inquired my sister in English, with a sigh, for there had been a long silence in the room. Out on the landing some one was sweeping ; we could hear the swish of the broom. At a window across the court, some one was singing with one of those fascinating, rich, untrained voices I should have delighted to listen to if it had not, with the accompaniment of the hissing broom served as a lullaby to the old man.

“Perhaps he knew Leopold Robert ; ask him if he did ?”—We had spent the day before in unsuccessfully looking for the painter’s tomb.

It was a happy thought ; the old fellow brightened up.

“Yes, yes, a great painter !”

“Now, Lelie, interview him on that for fifteen minutes, and then I will have finished.”

“All right. Work as fast as you can, and I will try and keep him awake.”

Then to the old man :

“Robert ;—Robert,—he painted a large picture in Venice, did he not ?”

“Yes, the celebrated picture of the fishermen of the Adriatic. My father posed for one of the figures ;—which, I don’t remember, it was so many years ago. I used to make the fires in the Signor’s studio—(‘second oar’ again),—and once I posed for him to finish a hand.”

“Did not he die suddenly?”

The sitter started, turned his face towards Lelie and his old eyes full upon her,—lifted his head, drew his finger across his throat and clacked his tongue.—“Cut his throat !” he continued.

“How was that ?”—he had not startled us, nor were we interested ;—it was an old story, but the old man must be kept awake.

“Well, you see Leopold Robert painted a large picture, and when it was finished, exhibited it in the Belle Arte, where all Venice went to see it,—even the Director of the Academy. ‘How do you like my painting?’ asked Leopold Robert of the Director, for the Director was also a very great artist.”

“What was his name ?”

“I don’t remember now, it was so long ago.”—(If the Director had cut his throat, the gondolier would doubtless have remembered him.)

“‘Your painting is very beautiful ; it would be perfect,’ said the Director, ‘but for one thing.’ ‘What is that?’ asked Signor Robert.”

“‘Shall I show you ?’”

“‘Yes.’”

“Then the Director looked carefully at the painting again, and turning to the painter, said :—‘here the historian lost his pose, but this was new, and I waited for the denouement ;—’ The Director said: ‘Signor Leopold Robert, did you ever see a group of Chioggia fishermen without at least one of them had a pipe in his mouth ?’”

“Leopold Robert struck his forehead, looked at his picture again, went to his room and”—again the pantomime of the finger across the throat, to finish the sentence.

“But,” exclaimed Lelie, who knew the painter’s sad love story, and how pictures were made, “but it would have been so easy for him to have stuck pipes in all the men’s mouths—and in those of the women and children too, if necessary !”

The old man shook his head, not grasping the idea.

“Don’t,” I said ; “don’t spoil his story, it is probably one of the rumors of the time that was much easier believed than the truth.”

“But it is so stupid. *Voilà comment on écrit l’histoire !*”

The sketch was finished and our Beppo was radiant when we appeared again. The visit was no longer a mystery to him as he had probably kept up communication and had been informed of what was going on up stairs. He knew now that we had no thought of changing gondoliers, and perhaps he even had heard an abridged history of Lord Byron from some of the old gondolier’s descendants. He carefully took charge of the wet sketch and shut it up in the bow of our gondola, out of harm’s way, as if he felt an affection for it, and as we sailed homeward, he looked back, took off his broad brimmed hat, and saluted old Guiseppe Broccoz with an air of great kindness.

HENRY BACON.

Paris, January 10, 1884.

THE ETCHING, “THE REPRIMAND.”

The etching, “The Reprimand,” by Walter Shirlaw, after Eastman Johnson’s picture, which is given as a premium to each annual subscriber to the American Art Union, has been characterized by a competent authority as the finest figure etching thus far produced in this country, and one of the finest that has been published in the whole history of etching. In another number, Mr. James D. Smillie, himself a high authority upon such matters, very favorably expresses himself concerning the etching, in a letter to the editor.

“The Reprimand” shows the interior of an humble cottage with a broad, open fire-place. An old man is sitting near the chimney, and leaning forward, with severe expression, is reproving a young girl, who stands before him, for disobedience. His words, however, are slightly heeded ; she has turned aside with a toss of her head and a look that indicates smothered rebellion.

As studies of expression, the faces in the etching are remarkable. The figures are both admirable in drawing, and the quaint interior is well realized. As a composition, both in lines and in chiar-oscuro the work is exceedingly effective and pleasing.

This etching alone is worth several times the cost of the Annual Subscription to the American Art Union.